

The Way of a Man in Taming a Beast
and the Way of a Maid Whose Life
Was Brought Into Contact With His.

THE BULL

BY M. L. C. PICKTHALL,
Who Writes of Experiences
in a Great Landslide.

ALL day the launch had steamed north through the sea-channels. All day the bull had stood in the bows, roped to a treble lashed cross-timber as to a yoke, and the islands had responded to his angry voice. Sometimes he had strained in a fury against the ropes till the timbers groaned. Then Lennan turned from the rail and laid a hand on the thick, reddish curls between the horns. The bull's eyes rolled sidelong to see this man who did not fear him. He blew through his nostrils and was still.

The launch-lands looked from Lennan to the sea, and said, "There's two of them."

Lennan's hair grew in thick, reddish tufts low over his eyes, which were widely set, dark and of a slow, challenging stare. His shoulders were mighty, he moved deliberately, massively graceful. Men felt in him some smoldering power. They were afraid of him. He had never had a friend.

When evening split a yellow flame in the gray fathoms under the launch's forefoot, she turned to her harbor. Lennan saw a wharf, a shed and some log booms grow toward them, gradually becoming visible out of the substance of the forest.

Some of them said to him, "You taken over Macey's place?"

"Yes."

"That bull yours?"

"Yes."

"Well, there'll be trouble landin' him, sure."

The bull was to be landed first. When the tug tied up to the wharf, Lennan began to cut the lashings which had captivated all that strength. Men watched in silence, alert to scatter. There was no sound but the sharp whirr of the knife among taut ropes.

The bull was motionless. But as the last rope fell, suddenly and monotonously agile, he wheeled from the deck. The beast stood an instant, breathing fiercely of freedom. The tawny sunset clung to his tawny side; he was like a bull of brass. Then he reared at the rail, his great bulk rushed through the air, crashed into the sea. A moment, and his head horned and curled, centered a fume of steam as he swam to shore.

"He's got away on 'y," breathed the men clustered in a minute along the rail.

LENNAN stood up. His face was reddened, his eyes had lighted formidable fires. He strode to the side. Where the bull had plunged, he plunged. He began to swim and strokes that lifted him half-clear of the water.

"Ah-h-h!" sighed the watching men.

Lennan gained. He came up with the bull, who swerved from him, snorting heavily. Lennan followed. His hand shot out, pressing on the ringed nose. The bull went under, and Lennan followed, holding him there. When he heaved rose, he was choking and blinded. He turned; only to meet that grip.

The sea frothed around the mighty struggle, and an endless ring of gold ran out from it to meet the sunset. The bull's horns had ripped Lennan's shirt to the belt; his tanned body was yellow in the yellow light. It seemed that in the trouble of golden foam, a man of brass fought with a brazen bull.

"Ah-h-h!" sighed the men on deck. "He's done."

The tide was setting in. The bull felt rock under his hoofs and dragged his bulk clear of the sea. Half-drowned, he had no more will to fight; he smashed through the shallows to the dry land.

Lennan splashed alongside, one hand fast in the nose-ring. The bull looked sidelong at him, blowing from his nostrils a bitter spume. Lennan called back to the launch, "Leave my stuff on the wharf, and I'll fetch it up."

The men were silent till one said, "I told you there was two of them." Then they began to unload the rest of the cargo.

Following the trail to Macey's, Lennan and the bull went on into a deep twilight of cedars. They were brazen no more. They moved like huge imponderable shadows, shouldering the boughs.

The trail was a mere tunnel through old slashings. They climbed steadily, leaving the sea. They were wet from the sea, and now the trees began to spray them with dew. A cold wind breathed on them from invisible snow peaks. The bull moaned rumblingly.

Behind Macey's place a mountain rose, covered with young burned forest. When they came there, there were stars among the trees on the top, but the early night was clear and green. Lennan could discern half-hearted land, warp fences and a garden, all blurred with sword-fern and salmonberry. He looked for the log house that was to be his home.

He stopped. He had expected no welcome, but some one was there. A woman stood on the porch, picking roses from a climber that straggled over the door. They were white roses. Little was visible but her hands, moving among them.

LENNAN and the bull waited, incredulously still.

When her hands were full, she turned. She had not seen Lennan. Yet now, advancing a little, she said clearly, "Is that you, my weaver?"

Lennan stood motionless. The soft voice went on, with a little laugh, "I've waited so long for you. Now you're come, say, I'm glad to be home."

"I'm glad to be home," said Lennan.

In a moment the bull lowered his head, bellowed thunderously. She had been utterly still, staring and dumb; only her hands had opened and let the flowers fall. Lennan, moving toward her out of the night, guessed the white disk of her face sharpened by black panic. Some inner apprehension, rather than light, showed them to each other. Then she was gone. Lennan listened to her night, like the flight of a bird, beating away into the forest.

Again the bull challenged. Lennan hid him to a shed and heaped before him some of the hay Macey had left. In the morning Lennan fetched up his supplies. Then he began to build a mighty corral for the bull. It took him a long while to cut the timber for this after that he mended the

house. He could not do much with the land that year. So he found work at a mill ten miles off, and walked in twice weekly to care for the bull. Otherwise the bull was alone with his head of hay.

Eve, lying awake at night, would hear his great voice rolling among the hills, summoning the herd four hundred miles out of call. Behind her shut eyelids she would see pictures of the bull pacing his corral and challenging the solitude he could not understand. She thought, "Perhaps I understand because I'm lonely, too."

She would hear in her sleep another voice, "I'm glad to be home." Then, waking, she would hide her face from the night itself, whispering, "But he couldn't see me! He'll never know who it was!"

She lived with her married sister; she had nowhere else to live without loneliness. Her brother-in-law liked to tease her. He said once, "You've had to quit your playin' up at Macey's place."

"Yes," agreed Eve still.

"I bet you! No stealin' flowers with the new owner around."

"What's his name?" asked Eve.

"Lennan. A great bull-back of a fellow, with red in his eyes. The boys let him alone. He's marked 'Danger.'"

Eve thought of the man and the bull up there by the mountain—formidable, solitary. She confused them in her dreams. It was Lennan she saw pacing the corral and calling, deep-throated, to the night. Once she would herself with a cry on her own lips. That night she slept no more.

She dreaded to see Lennan; though he could not know.

In that small community she could not avoid him for long. She met him at the store, on the trail, waiting for mail on the wharf. He passed her without a sign of recognition, always with his suggestion of something menacing and alien, always alone. But when she had passed she was aware of his steady regard.

She told herself, "He couldn't have seen me."

THE foreboding rains came early, deluged the world for a week, and passed in a roll of thunder and a double rainbow over Macey's place. The forest sucked the wet audibly, the streams ran full. Plants put forth hurried leaves, rocks greened into a lace of little ferns, quail ran and piped by the raw logs of the bull's corral. It was like another spring. Then the clouds gathered again, coming up out of the sea.

The weather broke again; and that day Eve must carry a message to a settler who lived across the mountain. Returning, from the burnt height behind Macey's place, she saw the gray clouds drop lances suddenly to the ocean. She ran, but the rains were quicker. They struck the shore, came inland with a sound of trampling, drums. The forest bowed. Wind and rain struck on her together; in a moment the trail ran fluid under her feet; she battled as if with the wings of implacable angels.

Breathless, she slipped on a stone and fell. She was sodden; her clothes dripped. She lay in an instant of covered her eyes. With a small, humble sound of distress, she tried to rise against the rain.

Something light-footed yet ponderous approached her. She heard the rain beat on another body. For an instant she visioned a mist of rain spraying from the bull's shoulders, and cowered. Then she knew it was Lennan in an oldskin coat.

He said nothing. He stopped and lifted her, and that easier to her. He carried her silently to the house and set her down in an old chair just inside the door. She cleared the drowned hair from her eyes. She saw a square of gray glitter, and roses above, hanging heavily. Outside was all a roar and shining of rain. She was in an instant of quiet, she could hear her clothes dripping on the floor. Her breath stilled. The silence became an oppression. She looked up at last into Lennan's face.

Then her pulses raced, hammering shame. For she saw that he knew her. Everything else in a moment was forgotten and out of mind between them. They might have been laid in their little silence on another star.

Lennan stared at her heavily, his head lowered, his shoulders swiveling a little. He said, "You ain't been for more roses?" Eve's lips moved, but no sound came.

He said, and that easier to her, "I said, and she knew that as he said it he became formidable. 'Tell me, who was you waiting for at my place, that night I came home?'"

"No one."

He put out his hand, swept her roughly to his feet. "Don't lie to me," he said. Eve was silent. She lifted her hands and covered her face. Outside, the bull sent a sudden thunder into the rain.

Lennan laughed on the same note. He took her into his arms. She gasped, feeling his intolerable strength inclose her. He said in her ear, "Any way, you'd be as well for you?"

She grew cold and still as if she died. Lennan turned her face up to his own.

"Then he too grew still. For that face was wet with tears."

Presently he released her. He stood away from her. Eve waited, such a calm no word, no sound. And without looking at him, she walked steadily out of the house, under the hammered roses and away into the rain. From the corral he watched her head lowered, shoulders swiveling a little, as if ready to charge something that had hurt him. She walked steadily home.

SHE did not leave her own home for a week. The rain was heavy enough for her excuse.

And quivering rubbish and entered it. After a while she saw the bull. He was pressed against the fence nearest the house. His head was lowered as if he would charge her. But she was no longer afraid. Pity had become so deep it was strength. She could discern his sides heaving; his breath steamed whitely in the chill. Eve said, with a kind of surprise, "Why, he's scared!"

She laid her hand on his head where the stiff red curls were wet with dew. He rumbled in his throat, and crowded toward her gently. "Yes," she said, "there may be another slide. You better come along with me." She threw her arm over the great

neck, and he followed her with lowered head, snorting. The touch of the damp hide was pleasant to her, and the mighty warmth beneath it.

They went down the trail together. To one side lay the tract of the landslide, as if a plough had passed over the slopes. The trail was strewn with wreck, as foam strews a beach after a high tide. The bull trod down the earth, crashed through the scattered saplings, and Eve followed in the track he made.

They went by a wider spread of earth, a raw wound plowed bare. The starlight shone on it as peacefully as if it had been there always. Suddenly the bull stopped, lowered his head, and breathed rumblingly at something which lay there, half buried in soil, a few yards from the trail. It was the body of a man.

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"Are you hurt bad?"

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HIS words came in furious jerks. He was buried to the lower ribs, so that his head on his arms a minute. He was exhausted, beaten. He said again, "I can't get away. And struggled, panting till his breath and threw her that. He said uncertainly with his hands at the soft.

She had now a broad band of homespun with a good ten feet of queer rope tied on at each end. She tested it once or twice. It was strong. She tied sticks to each end. The bull was near her, cowed by the terror of the night. She struck him suddenly on the flank, and he wheeled with his back to Lennan. She slipped the broad band of homespun across his chest. The ends she managed to toss to Lennan. The sticks fell within his reach, he drew them toward him and twisted the ropes round his hands. This tightened the lines. The bull felt the pull of them and swung uncertainly. The band slipped on his chest. He backed, snorting.

Presently Lennan moved. He came to her with hesitant steps. He stretched out his hand, but did not touch her. He was fighting for words. Something in his strength and his trouble brought the tears to Eve's eyes.

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No one, it seemed, knew Lennan well enough to warn him.

Those days, Eve went silent about the house. She was hardly conscious what her own thoughts were, but sometimes she said it can't last this way. It can't.

Then one night she woke and knew the rain had stopped. She left her bed and went to the window. The forest was black under the stars. Only the mountain behind Macey's was covered with a clinging cloud. It was the one white thing in the dark night, the one mystery where the stars saw everything clear. It seemed there for a purpose, a concealment of some hushed business of the night and the hill. In a moment, in the beat of a pulse, Eve was afraid.

She struck a match and looked at the little clock on the homestead bureau. It was two o'clock. Through the thin partition where the others slept a child stirred and cried drowsily. Eve instantly blew out the match and dressed herself in the dark. It never occurred to her to wake her sister. Lonely all her life, she must be lonely in its supreme hour. She left without waking any one.

She turned up the trail to Macey's place, almost running. She felt confusedly that she had very little time. . . . She was not thinking clearly; she was past that—perhaps above it. If she could have expressed herself, she would have prayed that her flesh might break into wings, so that she might be in time.

The silence was unbroken. It was as if that white cloud smothered all the normal noises of a forest night. It rose in a glimmering mound at the head of the trail. The trees were spiked against it as if it were a moon. It drew all the light there was. It drew Eve, as if a wind blew toward it and she were a leaf on the wind.

She was so high now that the sea breathed on her across the forest and the stars were near; climbing, climbing to Macey's place; climbing to Lennan. . . . Then she heard a stir. She listened. There was silence on the mountain, in the cloud. But a stone all near her, something coughed in the sea-damp, a hoof rang on rock. The deer were going past her, going down to the shore. The deer were leaving the mountain.

She struck her hands on her heart, and climbed and climbed.

Here was Macey's old clearing. Here the field. There the great log fence of the bull's corral, a darkness in the dark. The anchored cloud towered over her. There—in the shadow of the cloud, under the hill—was the house. Dark. . . . She flung out her hands and began to run.

A rotted rose struck her in the face like a ball of paper, broke, and dashed rain into her eyes. There was the door, shut. She beat on it with her hands and shouted. There was no answer. She flung it open and ran in. She knew instantly that the house was empty, that Lennan was not there. But she went from wall to wall, groping by the glimmer of the cloud.

He was not there. He was at the shingle-mill. She turned irresolutely and faltered toward the door. A faint shudder crawled through the timbers of the house. Eve's eyes stared, her hands were over her ears. For that shudder was a sound, only it was too large for the hearing. It became a wave that broke on her and rocked the house like a ship. It became a weight that crushed her to the door. She lay there, dazed. She thought it was the cloud had fallen. She moaned, "Lift it off me. It's so white."

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She went to the door, surprised to find herself staggering with nervous weakness. The house was not touched. The edge of the landslide had swept past it. The clearing was heaped with wreckage as if a tide had been there. The sharp black angle of the corral was a huddle of sticks and rocks. Eve struggled toward the corral through shallow mud

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